

# Written Evidence: Skills for the Future - Apprenticeships and Training

Evidence Submitted by the Heritage Alliance

September 2024

## About Us:

The [Heritage Alliance](#) is England's umbrella body for the heritage sector. We unite more than 200 organisations which together have over 7 million members, volunteers, trustees and staff. The vast majority of England's historic environment is owned, managed and cared for by Heritage Alliance members. The Heritage Alliance's specialist Skills, Education and Engagement Advocacy Group has fed into this response.

## Committee Questions:

### **Q1. What kinds of skills do you think will be needed for the future of the UK economy? Is the UK's skills and training system capable of equipping increasing numbers of people with these skills?**

The heritage sector contributes an estimated £45.1 billion in gross value added to the UK economy and supports over 538,000 jobs. It is estimated to make a larger direct contribution to UK GDP than the security, defence, or aerospace industries (Heritage Counts, 2023). The UK is home to world-class craftspeople, and a rich artisan tradition. However, as existing professionals leave the heritage sector (through retirement and, increasingly, in search of better pay) they leave behind gaps in traditional skills and crafts which cannot easily be filled.

There are already widespread shortages in a range of fields: from stonemasonry and carpentry, to archaeology, research and conservation, to book binding, traditional land-based skills to provide natural materials and to maintain historic landscapes; basketmaking, and silk weaving. The most recent edition of the Heritage Crafts Association's Red List of Endangered Crafts features 84 endangered crafts, 62 critically endangered crafts, and five crafts which are now extinct in the UK. A recent survey undertaken by National Historic Ships identified that 40% of respondents cited an ageing workforce as the biggest challenge to the Maritime Heritage sector, closely followed by 30% of respondents struggling to attract a younger workforce (aged 16-30). Providing new pathways into heritage skills would offer vocational training, opportunities for employment, and boost national economic growth, whilst simultaneously safeguarding endangered trades and techniques.

Within the heritage sector, there are also well-reported shortages in 'generic' business skills that are vital for navigating financial instability, such as budgeting, marketing and fundraising, project management, and digital literacy. Skills shortages do not only affect junior or early career heritage workers; across the cultural sector more broadly, there is evidence of a significant gap in 'leadership' skills at a senior level (such as strategic planning, resource management, or stakeholder engagement). Insights and an evidence base regarding this issue were captured as part of the [Rebuilding Heritage programme](#).

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Heritage skills will also be essential in realising ambitions in other areas of the UK's future economy. The UK government has made a commitment to be carbon neutral by 2050. Sensitive retrofit and adaptation and a presumption to recycling historic buildings over demolition, will be fundamental in achieving this goal and to accomplish sustainable development. Historic England estimates that retrofitting just half of all historic buildings over a 25-year period will reduce carbon by 32 million of CO<sub>2</sub>. Our built environment is the oldest in Europe, with 1 in 3 homes built before 1919. It is estimated that the UK needs to double the number of conservation-skilled retrofit contractors if it is to meet its Net Zero targets. (*Heritage and Carbon* report, 2023)

Green skills are also in short supply for the management of historic landscapes and other green spaces for their intrinsic and climate resilience, putting at future risk the almost £3billion in GDP that garden tourism contributes to the UK [DCMS select report on Garden Design and Tourism, 2019]. 70% of businesses report that they already struggle to find the skilled garden workers they need [figure from RHS Horticulture Matters]. A lack of sufficient academic qualifications and training in botany, garden history, horticulture and other relevant skills limits entry to the field and reduces the UK's ability to manage and benefit from its extensive historic landscape heritage in an informed and environmentally sustainable way. The careful adaptation of historic designed landscapes both in themselves and in association with listed buildings must also be considered, and appropriate skills and resources allowed for, as they become increasingly vulnerable to unpredictable weather, to new pests and diseases and to changes in their use and character which increases associated risk to the buildings and below-ground remains through drought, fire, infestation and different visitor patterns.

The recently published [Historic Environment Skills and Careers Action Plan for England](#) (HESCAPE) outlines a range priorities to develop skills in the historic environment. It demonstrates where gaps lie and provides a structured and prioritised delivery framework to tackling skills issues.

## **Q2. Is it clear to everyone involved in the skills system what the respective roles of the Government, employers, individuals and institutions are within that system?**

The landscape and framework for responsibilities has become very complicated over an extended period, particularly with devolved regional responsibilities and specific funded initiatives over the years. It would be useful for some decluttering within the landscape, to assess where there are overlaps or gaps at a broader level, and to regularly publish info on the 'landscape' of skills at a high level with clear articulation of responsibilities.

## **Q3. What is the appropriate level of government intervention in the development of skills policies? How can government best add value in this area?**

Government could best add value in the area of skills policy by:

- Working with sector experts to develop tailored strategies for high priority occupational areas, e.g. A National Retrofit Strategy, Strategy for Heritage Crafts at Risk.
- Protecting investment to funders that targets capacity-building.

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The National Lottery Fund's Heritage 2023 strategy outlined that one of its core investment principles is 'organisational sustainability and resilience'. This has guided this funding organisation to deliver grants which provide heritage organisations with the opportunity to learn new skills, processes and contingencies. By protecting the 20% share of National Lottery funding for the Heritage Fund, capacity-building skills programmes can continue to be delivered.

## **Q4. Are current Government policies on skills, particularly apprenticeships and training, sufficiently clear? Have policies and the institutional set-up been sufficiently consistent over time? If not, what changes or reforms would you recommend?**

The Heritage Alliance recommends reform to government policy on skills related to the apprenticeship system and to targeted interventions for specific occupational areas.

On apprenticeships, the Heritage Alliance has proposed a number of measures that would make the system work better for freelancers and small businesses. These include:

- Greater support for sharing apprenticeships between multiple organisations.
- Introduction of a cross-subsidy mechanism to help fund apprenticeships within smaller organisations.
- Reform to the Apprenticeship Levy so that unspent funds can be allocated in a targeted manner to address skills gaps (e.g. in conservation and heritage crafts).

With regards to targeted interventions for specific occupational areas, one example proposed by the Heritage Alliance is the introduction of a National Retrofit Strategy, including:

- A skills delivery plan to double the number of specialist retrofit contractors;
- Targeted grant schemes to decarbonise historic buildings;
- A 'one-stop-shop' advisory service for homeowners of traditional or historic buildings seeking qualified retrofit advice;
- Reform of EPCs to include a 'whole house' assessment approach for historic buildings;
- Specialist training for planners, building surveyors, geoscientists and landscape architects to understand the physical and cultural capacity of an associated historic landscape where ground-source heating or similar carbon zero infrastructure may be proposed to benefit the historic building.

## **Q5. Are the right institutions in place to ensure an effective skills system for the future? Should coordinating institutions be national, regional or sectoral, or a mixture of each?**

A mixture of each would help standardise approaches to training and provide effective support from the top down, whilst regional and sectoral responses will enable organisations to respond to specific issues.

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**Q6. Concerns have been raised over the operation of the Apprenticeship Levy, particularly in relation to the decline in young people taking on apprenticeships. Is there a case for reforming the levy, for example by ring-fencing more levy funding for training for younger apprentices?**

The Heritage Alliance has called for reform to the Apprenticeship Levy, so that it works better for freelancers and small businesses. Reform to allow unspent funds to be allocated in a targeted manner could help to address skills gaps (e.g. in conservation, retrofit and green construction and heritage crafts).

**Q7. What should the role of business be in encouraging the development of skills in the UK? Should business be a consumer, funder, trainer or co-designer of skills provision?**

**Q8. In a more mobile, flexible labour market, what incentives do employers have to provide training for their employees? Why do you think that employer investment in training has declined in recent decades?**

A sector survey conducted by the Heritage Alliance indicated that the majority of heritage workers *do* feel that their organisation is supportive of skills development, but that they faced limitations in terms of both money and time. This suggests that long standing financial pressures, exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis, may have contributed to a decline in employer investment in training.

**Q9. Should further incentives be put in place to reverse the decline in employer investment in training, and if so, what form should these incentives take?**

Offering financial support to cover core costs including staff time and enabling routes for partnerships across the heritage sector could help to incentivise training opportunities. However, good and effective training can only come out of a stable sector and incentives must be accompanied with a wider response to other key challenges facing heritage sectors on the whole.

**Q10. What incentives do individuals have to involve themselves in apprenticeships and training? Is the system available and attractive enough to encourage individuals to seek training, and if not, what can be done to improve this?**

Financial barriers and a lack of guaranteed employment at the end of some training programmes are key barriers facing individuals entering training.

For many trainees, financial barriers can stop them before the training has started. This might include lack of funds to attend interviews, taster days, or to support themselves before receiving their first payment. Financial incentives should consider upfront support to prevent drop-outs and enable a diverse range of candidates to become involved in heritage. Not all training opportunities offer a clear pathway to paid work, and some learners will discover different interests throughout their

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experience. Building partnerships across the heritage sector can help create a variety of job opportunities and prevent loss of talent to non-heritage sectors.

## **Q11. How does the UK's approach to skills and training compare to those of other countries? Are there examples of good practice that the UK should be learning from?**

Scotland has recently published a [Heritage Skills Strategy](#), which outlines steps to address the loss of traditional crafts and tackle the heritage skills gap. The development of an equivalent strategy for England would be beneficial.

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## **Contact**

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